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DEPT FOR G/TIP, EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TIP](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [CY](#)

SUBJECT: G/TIP VISITOR SEES FIRST-HAND CYPRIOT EFFORTS
AGAINST TRAFFICKING

REF: NICOSIA 881

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: G/TIP Official Jennifer Donnelly visited Cyprus January 31 - February 2 to evaluate RoC efforts to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) on the island. In her meetings, Donnelly acknowledged government successes, such as the recent passage of comprehensive anti-TIP legislation and the opening of a government-run victims' shelter. At the same time, she noted RoC slowness in implementing a demand-reduction public awareness campaign and the decline in TIP-related prosecutions, and questioned why the government still utilized the "artiste" work permit category. Summarizing, she considered the Cypriot government's anti-trafficking effort a mixed bag. END SUMMARY

Government Making Slow Progress, Urges "Carrot" Approach

12. (SBU) G/TIP officer Jennifer Donnelly came to Cyprus to assess the trafficking situation here, gauge the government's political will to fight TIP, and tour the newly-opened government shelter. She began the visit at the Ministry of Interior (MoI), which coordinates the RoC's anti-trafficking efforts but is also responsible for processing artiste permit requests. MoI Permanent Secretary Lazaros Savvides surprised Donnelly by unveiling a change to the permit regime that the Council of Ministers soon would consider. Although hesitant to reveal details prior to the Council meeting, Savvides claimed the changes were inspired by procedures currently used in Greece. In a break from current practice, artiste work permits would be granted to groups of women, not individuals. He side-stepped Donnelly's question whether the proposed changes would result in a major reduction in the number of permits issued, and provided no justification why group (vice individual) issuance represented an improvement. Turning to demand reduction, Savvides revealed that MoI has allocated 41,000 euros to fund an awareness campaign, to be launched in March/April after Cypriot elections. Savvides was not clear on the details of the campaign, nor on the extent it would specifically address the domestic demand for trafficked women in Cyprus.

13. (SBU) Donnelly next met with Social Welfare Officer Maria Kyratzi and toured the government's newly-opened victims' shelter. Kyratzi noted that the MFA and International

Organization for Migration (IOM)-Greece would be collaborating later in the year to offer a seminar for training government officials on trafficking. She explained how, under Cyprus's new trafficking law, police must notify Social Welfare immediately if they suspected a trafficking situation, and discussed the financial, psychological, and medical services they provided to victims. Kyratzi also said that Social Welfare would welcome the establishment of an IOM office in Cyprus, currently under discussion. She clarified that the shelter run by NGO STIGMA did not receive additional government assistance because it did not meet unspecified eligibility criteria in 2006. At the shelter, Donnelly took positive note of security measures in place, but was concerned the building lacked sufficient bathroom facilities were it ever to fill to capacity (15 individuals). Shelter staff informed her that seven trafficking victims were currently housed there.

14. (SBU) Donnelly next called on Foreign Ministry officials. Multilateral Affairs chief George Kasoulides revealed that the government and OSCE would collaborate on a May 2008 seminar on combating TIP. It was vital to convince rank-and-file Cypriots of the severity of the TIP problem, he emphasized. Abroad, too, the RoC had a responsibility to fight trafficking, and some Cypriot embassies now were displaying anti-TIP posters and dispensing pamphlets to prospective visa seekers. Kasoulides admitted, however, that he was unaware of specific TIP training for Cypriot embassy staff or standardized procedures for interviewing "artiste" applicants. Regarding an IOM office in Cyprus, Kasoulides promised MFA support should the government decide to invite the organization or if IOM decides or requests to open here. "We're making progress," he contended, "though perhaps not as much as you'd like, or as fast. But we are moving in the right direction." Kasoulides worried the next TIP report would criticize the government over the situation in the north, where it did not exercise effective control. He also encouraged the USG to favor the "carrot" approach over the "stick" in seeking additional anti-trafficking progress from the Cypriot government.

15. (SBU) Rita Superman, Director of the Cypriot Police TIP
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unit, briefed Donnelly on recent operations. Police had conducted 34 raids on suspect establishments within the last year, and performed detailed checks of over 100 others. The TIP unit continues to be understaffed with only Superman and two other junior officers assigned to the unit. Superman noted the alarming trend of pimps and traffickers moving operations out of the cabarets and into private apartments, which complicated Police efforts to build cases. She also discussed the criteria for identifying trafficking victims and admitted there still was no SOP for handling trafficking victims. To illustrate, of 54 trafficking cases her unit had processed, some involving multiple victims, 20 women had "self-identified" themselves as TIP victims. On prosecutions, of 78 persons originally charged with trafficking offenses, nine were convicted under prostitution-related charges, since finding them guilty under the new, tougher law was proving far more difficult. (Note: Some NGOs, specifically STOP International, allege that there has been a decline in law enforcement raids on cabarets, and that many cabaret owners are tipped off about law enforcement operations in advance. Also, STOP argues that prosecutors are not well-trained and that cases are hastily put together, making it easy for judges to dismiss them or find that them "full of holes." End note.)

Cabaret Owners Deny Trafficking, Claim Their Rights Are Violated

16. (SBU) Donnelly received a rare look into the supply side of the trafficking business, meeting three members of the

Cyprus Cabaret Owners' Association. The businessmen discussed their operations and complained that their rights constantly were being violated, noting how 40 cabarets had been shut down because of overly-stringent government regulation. The owners detailed the process of how women were recruited legally into the cabarets, and explained how each received a guaranteed daily salary (from 25 - 45 USD), a 10 percent commission on drink sales, plus free housing, local taxis, and airplane tickets to and from her homeland. Salaries and other income were deposited directly into artistes checking accounts. Alarming, the impresarios admitted to de facto debt bondage by acknowledging the existence of oral contracts stipulating that artistes had to repay their agents for these "free" airplane tickets.

Civil Society Is Strengthening, Church Decides it Must "Say Something"

17. (SBU) To assess civil society anti-TIP activities, Donnelly engaged the local office of STOP International as well as a number of Greek- and Turkish Cypriot organizations. Two local NGOs briefed her on their own (vice the government's) anti-trafficking awareness campaigns, noting how the public seemed increasingly knowledgeable about the topic. Funding remained problematic, however; despite active lobbying of Cyprus's private sector, they had received just 500 USD in pledges from two island banks. NGO relations with the government remained spotty. Representatives claimed the government had viewed their anti-trafficking involvement with suspicion and, in some cases, overt hostility. And those organizations which had conducted the awareness campaign feared retribution from the government in the form of reduced appropriations for other operations.

18. (SBU) Donnelly ended her visit by meeting two Church of Cyprus officials new to the TIP fight, Metropolitan Vasilios and Bishop Porfyrios. The Church officials attributed their newfound interest in combating trafficking to a recent funding appeal from NGO Stigma, their TIP-related interaction with Embassy staff, and a belief that the Church "must say something." Both men expressed interest in collaborating with the Embassy and asked for materials to educate themselves and other Church officials on TIP. They are planning to lead an inter-denominational conference on trafficking in Cyprus sometime in the future.

Comment

19. (SBU) Donnelly's observation that Cyprus's TIP record remains a mixed bag generally matches ours. Real progress occurred during the last twelve months, from the passage of comprehensive anti-TIP legislation to the opening of the

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long-awaited victims' shelter. Yet police and prosecutors have not secured convictions with the new law, and stories abound of operational snafus at the shelter. Overall, however, we continue to see the glass half-full and rising. Increasing pressure from media, civil society, the international community, and now the Church is pushing the government to make slow and steady progress to combat TIP. Of key concern now is the new artiste work permit regime, which, according to high-level Embassy contacts, the Council of Ministers approved February 13 (we are seeking a copy, and will forward its gist to G/TIP). If it proves only window-dressing, the government will have lost the opportunity to fulfill a key component of its National Action Plan against trafficking. But if it results in a significant reduction of women issued permits, it would represent a real step forward for Cyprus. End comment.

110. (U) The Embassy has coordinated transmission of this

message with Ms. Donnelly.
SCHLICHER